

when a people have long suffered from abuses, they become to some extent inured to them, and those who do not directly suffer from them, or do not realize from what source their sufferings come, are liable to become indifferent to the abuses, so that in some cases portions of the people will resist reforms that would benefit themselves.

Again, if abuses are allowed to go too long unchecked, till the people rise in indignation to overthrow them, there is danger that they may at the same time overthrow some other institutions connected with the abuses, but in themselves of a beneficial character. The most memorable examples of such mistaken action were seen in the French Revolution, when much that was good was swept away along with a far greater amount of evil. Nor has the risk of such action been removed by the extension of political power to the masses, nor by the adoption of more peaceful methods of agitation. Laws may be suddenly altered and institutions as suddenly overthrown by the simple power of votes; and if the men and the classes whose voice in the government is most influential neglect their duty and delay reforms too long, the people may enact some sweeping change which wiser counsels cannot approve.

Every European nation is burdened with certain laws and institutions handed down from the past and wholly unadapted to the present time. The people will not much longer submit to them and to the injustice and oppression they produce. The signs of popular awakening are everywhere visible, and important changes cannot be much longer delayed. Wisdom and justice alike require that the changes be made in due season, so as to prevent the social disturbance that will otherwise arise.

But it may be said that in America the people are not suffering from the working of old institutions inherited from the past, and consequently that the lesson we seek to enforce is less important to our rulers than to those of European states. It is true that we are not oppressed by feudalism, as many of the peoples of Europe are; yet the lesson we have drawn is not on that account the less needed here. Indeed, it is only a few years since we had in this country an institution far worse than any now existing in Europe, and a terrible civil war was necessary to get rid of it; a war that might perfectly well have been avoided, if our forefathers had obeyed the voice of justice and abolished slavery at an earlier date. For

the future, however, the task of statesmen in this country will be not so much to abolish old abuses as to prevent the formation of new ones, and for this purpose seasonable action is imperatively required. Abuses are growing up in this country which, if allowed to go unchecked, may develop into forms of injustice as oppressive as any now prevalent in Europe.

What these abuses are can only be briefly indicated here. Those connected with our administrative systems are too well known to require particular notice, and they are, moreover, now in a fair way of being removed. The pressure of public opinion has in this case proved sufficient to secure the adoption of the necessary measures, and now that the reform has been initiated it will probably be carried successfully through. But there are some other abuses, in which large and powerful bodies of men are interested, which will not be so easily dealt with. One of the worst of them is the perversion of the powers and resources of government for the benefit of special interests, an evil that has already attained great magnitude among us, and is still on the increase. Instances of this kind have been repeatedly seen in our tariff legislation, which has been largely controlled by a few powerful interests for their own special benefit, to the detriment or neglect of others and of the people at large. So flagrant in some cases have these abuses been that opposition has been roused even among protectionists; and yet our legislators have not had courage enough, or have not taken enough interest in the subject, to apply a remedy.

But probably the most difficult problems of American politics hereafter will be furnished by the affairs of the corporations, which have now become so important an element in our industrial life. Their success in developing the resources of the country and promoting its prosperity has been remarkable; but they have brought with them abuses which call for reform, and which, if not reformed in season, may rouse vehement resistance among the people. There is danger, too, of their gaining control at times of the sources of legislative or executive government, and using its powers to promote their selfish interests. To prevent their doing so will require watchfulness on the part of the people, and higher principles than are now universal among our public men,—higher, indeed, than some among us seem to be inclined to demand of American legislators and rulers.

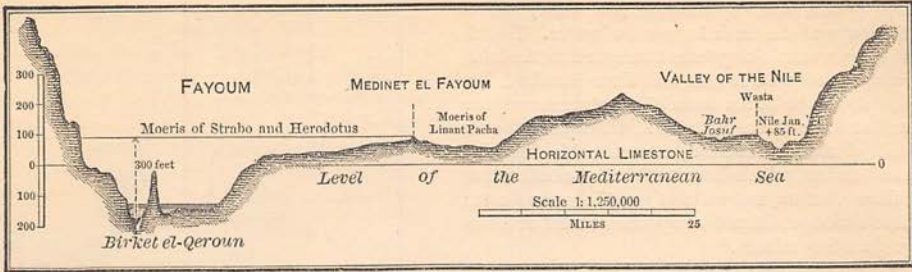
OPEN LETTERS.

Lake Mœris and the Greeks.

WHILE the modernists are disputing the claims of Greek to a place among the useful studies in these days of chemical analysis and the metric system, it has fallen to the lot of an American scholar, a student of the ancient Greek and a devout believer in the sanity of the old historians of Greece, to make, through this very devotion, a discovery which promises to remove a source of danger to the population of Egypt, and

to put into the hands of English capitalists, if they use their opportunity well, a valuable enterprise.

To the Egyptian cultivator the river Nile is at once the angel of mercy and the king of terrors. Coming down from the high plateaus of Abyssinia, with its tribute from the eternal snows, it brings blessings and curses in its flood. Once a year the melted snows and the vast volumes of rain falling on the slopes of the Abyssinian table-lands fill the channel of the river to its widest margin, flood the



SECTION OF EGYPT THROUGH THE FAYOUM.

rich arable lands below in the broad valley of the stream, and threaten the island-like villages that rise above the waste of waters. A little excess, such as comes occasionally in this generosity of the mountains, and the dweller in the long Nile valley runs for his life. For he is more or less a fugitive who snatches a harvest, but carries his hut on his back, as it were, and stands ready to run with house, harvest, and home, at the sound of the rising flood. As the great stream approaches the Mediterranean, this cultivable land becomes of extreme importance to the Egyptian. His only harvest lies here; his favored cities creep up to the very edge of the river; his grandest monuments lie buried beneath mounds of sun-dried brick encircled by the green waters; his temples frown from the very edge of the border plateau; the pyramids, the sepulchers of kings, lie near the track of the stream; and, at last, where its swollen waters have discharged through many mouths into the sea, a commerce of great value to England and all Europe finds its home. But just here, between these mouths, lie vast morasses, once of fresh water, but now in part, through inlets of the sea, turned into salt marsh and shallow lakes. What might be the best land in Egypt—hundreds of square miles—is here uncultivated, given over to the sea and the dread of the Nile. With the inertness of the Egyptian Government and the insecurity of its finances, nothing has been done for a century to reclaim these unused lands. And yet "an effective control of the Nile," says a writer in the "Saturday Review," would make it very easy to drain and cultivate much the greater part of Lake Mareotis (near Alexandria) and the other morasses. "The reclaimed land would be available in a comparatively short space of time, and the removal of such a large expanse of brackish water, most of which becomes mud in summer, would improve the health of the country by taking away the sources of malarial fever, and would, in fact, render those parts of the Delta a second Holland."

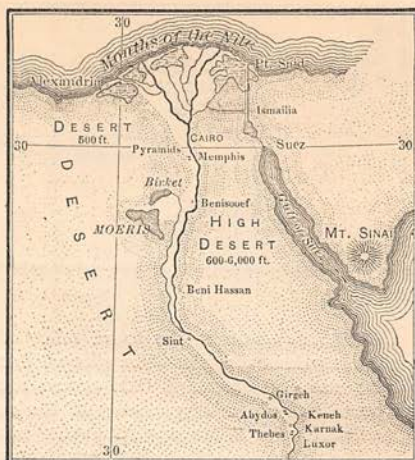
The question has always been one of "controlling" the excess in the rise of the Nile—an excess amounting at the most to about six feet, and lasting but a few hours at the longest. The ordinary rise in the river is counted on and utilized by a system of dikes, built originally at great expense, renewed from century to century, and now of enormous value. Through them, by sluice-ways and an intricate system of canals, the river has been made to irrigate the valley in all cultivable areas, and is thus turned into a blessing to the inhabitants and a source of income to the Government. But how to treat the excess of high Nile has been the problem of ages.

To an American scholar, Mr. F. Cope Whitehouse, a son of the late Bishop of Illinois, is due what now appears to be the successful solution of this problem; and to his simple faith in the "father of history," whose word has been long discredited, the Egyptian cultivator seems now likely to owe more than to all the ancient offerings to the "powerful divinity" of the river. For, according to Herodotus, the problem of disposing of the superfluous waters of the Nile was attacked fully three thousand years ago. He says that the priests of Egypt told him that "Mén was the first king of Egypt, and that it was he who raised the dike which protects Memphis from the inundations of the Nile. Before his time the river flowed entirely along the sandy range of hills which skirts Egypt on the side of Libya. He, however, by banking up the river at the bend which it forms about a hundred furlongs south of Memphis, laid the ancient channel dry, while he dug a new course for the stream half-way between the two lines of hills. . . . Having thus, by turning the river, made the track where it used to run dry land," he "proceeded in the first place to build the city now called Memphis, which lies in the narrow part of Egypt." "The other kings," the priests told the historian, "were personages of no note or distinction, and left no monuments of any account, with the exception of the last, who was named Mœris." This king left among other memorials of his reign the work called Lake Mœris, which the historian describes as "more astonishing" than the Labyrinth, as the Labyrinth was more wonderful than the Pyramids. "The measure of its circumference is sixty schoenes, or three thousand six hundred furlongs, which is equal to the entire length of Egypt along the sea-coast. The lake stretches in its longest direction from north to south, and in its deepest parts is of the depth of fifty fathoms. The water of the lake does not come out of the ground, which is here excessively dry, but is introduced by a canal from the Nile. The current sets for six months into the lake from the river, and for the next six months into the river from the lake. While it runs outward it returns a talent of silver (\$1060) daily to the royal treasury from the fish that are taken, but when the current is the other way the return sinks to one-third of that sum." This account, given by Herodotus, is repeated in substance by Diodorus Siculus, who adds: "For being that the Nile never kept to a certain and constant height in its inundation, and the fruitfulness of the country ever depended upon its just proportions, he dug this lake to receive such water as was superfluous, that it might neither immoderately overflow the land, and so cause fens and

standing ponds, nor, by flowing too little, prejudice the fruits of the earth for want of water. To this end he cut a trench along from the river into the lake, fourscore furlongs in length and three hundred feet broad; into this he let the water of the river sometimes run, and at other times diverted it, and turned it over the fields of the husbandmen, at seasonable times, by means of sluices, which he sometimes opened, and at other times shut up, not without great labor and cost; for these sluices could not be opened or shut at a less charge than fifty talents."

Such, then, was the ancient solution of the problem of taking care of the excess of high Nile—a vast artificial lake, four hundred and fifty miles in circuit, with borders resembling a sea-beach, in extent a sea, and resembling the sea in the color of its waters; supporting, moreover, "two-and-twenty sorts of fish," of which so great a number was taken, says Diodorus Siculus, "that those who were employed continuously to salt them up (though they were multitudes of people) could hardly perform it." But this lake, as a beneficent factor in Egyptian life, disappeared, and the "father of history" became as the "father of lies." A shallow, brackish lake, the Birket el Qeroun, answering in no important particular to the supposed ancient lake, is all that now exists. Engineers—Egyptian and French—have visited the country in its vicinity, and established one or two points by accurate measurement and a thousand by guesses. Two or three important theories have been formed as to the possible site of the ancient lake, but none of them adequate to justify the story of Herodotus. Two years ago Mr. Whitehouse, suitably equipped, and having faith in the ancient historian,—a faith which he soon found he could not have in some modern geographers,—visited and explored "the entire area of the Fayoum and a large part of the contiguous desert," and, as Dr. Schweinfurth puts it, "was able to demonstrate by his personal observation the existence of physical conditions which had remained hitherto entirely unknown." That is, by his researches made in three visits and eight months of energetic labor, during which he pumped dry, not the bed of the Nile, but the Arab guides, the English travelers, the Khedive's officials and archives, the European archaeologists, with their cabinets and libraries, Mr. Whitehouse established a possible Lake Mœris, extending south of the Birket el Qeroun into a dry valley of the Wadi Reian, sufficiently large in area to contain the excess of waters of the "father of rivers." He ascertained depths and elevations, circumferences and islands, and verified the measurements of antiquity with sufficient accuracy to make a sound foundation for his theory. "His hypothesis," says Dr. Schweinfurth (who is pronounced the "first authority in Egyptian geography, whether ancient or modern"), "satisfies every reasonable requirement of searching criticism." Some of the highest authorities have accepted both theory and facts, and published long articles on the value of the lake depression in modern engineering. The Egyptian Government has shown a strong interest in the scheme of utilizing the new discovery.

The conclusion of Mr. Whitehouse's labor, then, seems to be, that a basin exists of sufficient depth and other dimensions,—a basin worthless for all other purposes than those of storage,—situated near the



LAKE MÆRIS RESTORED.

Nile, and easily reconnected with it by a comparatively inexpensive canal, already once dug and still visible in parts, and utilized in long sections; that this must have formed the southern part of the ancient Lake Mœris in the time of Herodotus and Strabo; that, if this part only were restored, it would hold in storage, to be made useful in irrigation, if necessary, all the waste waters of the overgrown and much-dreaded Nile floods; that, if so used, the Birket el Qeroun, which, since the opening of the Ibrahimieh canal, has encroached on the tillable soil, could be reduced to one-half its present size, and thus many thousand acres of good land be restored to its borders; that, furthermore, engineers could easily drain the lower marshes at the several mouths of the Nile father or mother and all their crocodile brood, and thus recover for Egypt many hundred square miles of its best fields.

"In the present state of engineering," says the writer in the "Saturday Review" (Dec. 1, 1883), speaking of Lake Mareotis, "the question of drainage is merely one of calculation and steam-pumps, but it would hardly take more than two years; then the ground which is left bare must be planted for three years with rice crops, and worked with fresh water, in order to extract the nitre. The fresh water can be supplied in any quantity from the Mahmoudieh canal, which runs between dikes through part of the lake itself, and feeds Alexandria, and in a short time a vast tract of land close to the most important port in the country would be ready for cultivation. A successful prosecution of the enterprise would certainly lead to the draining of the other lakes which border the Mediterranean coast of Egypt."

James Herbert Morse.

The Ku Klux Klan.

COMMENTS.

AS an old and constant reader of THE CENTURY I beg permission to comment upon your editorial notice of Mr. Wilson's most interesting history of the Ku Klux: "If it was a questionable device to place the power of the ballot, suddenly and without limitations,